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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000291

SIPDIS

CAIRO FOR MAXSTADT

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FEBRUARY 10

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter: Reason: 1.5(b) and (d)

1. (U) This periodic joint political report from Abuja and Lagos includes:

- Second Round of Voter Registration
- New PDP Gubernatorial Caucuses
- Potential Party Coalition vs. Obasanjo
- Will AD Support Obasanjo?
- Counterfeit Voter Cards in Lagos
- Igbo Group Chooses Presidential Candidate
- Atiku Gets a New Title

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SECOND ROUND OF VOTER REGISTRATION  
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2. (U) The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has completed its second round of voter registration for the upcoming presidential elections. While INEC has not published the number of voters registered in this round, our observations and discussions with numerous politicians indicate the turnout was low. Prior to this second round, INEC reportedly gave the police the names of over two million people who allegedly registered more than once during the initial registration last September.

3. (C) Perhaps further delaying finalization of the voters list, press reports indicated the names of over one million registrants in Kano state, the North's most populous state, might have been erased from INEC's database due to computer error. INEC confirmed that it had experienced computer errors, but declared the number of lost names to be significantly less. COMMENT: A Northern figure close to ANPP candidate Muhammadu Buhari alleged that all Northerners in INEC's computer department had been reassigned to other duties and suggested that these moves were part of an effort to manipulate upcoming polls. Whether either part of this allegation is true or not, many Northerners will decide to believe it as it conforms to their fears. END COMMENT.

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NEW PDP GUBERNATORIAL CAUCUSES  
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4. (U) After protests two weeks ago at PDP Headquarters in Abuja, the People's Democratic Party leadership ordered new gubernatorial caucuses in Kwara, Anambra, Osun and Borno. The protests alleged material irregularities in the previous caucuses in these states. The date has not been set yet for Anambra and Osun. The new primaries in Kwara and Borno took place February 1 with results the same as the first caucuses. No violence was reported. No decision has been made concerning protests of the Enugu caucus. The party formally approved the results of the Plateau caucus.

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POTENTIAL PARTY COALITION VS. OBASANJO  
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5. (SBU) Representatives from the majority of the new political parties met in Abuja January 29 to discuss a possible coalition. The ostensible rationale for the coalition was to oppose the two major parties and their flagbearers, President Obasanjo and his fellow former military Head of State, Muhammadu Buhari. Several parties had already convened presidential primaries and chosen their candidates (UNPP, JP, NDP, and APGA). As of right now, no party has publicly committed itself to the idea, with its suggestion of a joint opposition candidate. Most of them planned to "study" the concept further.

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WILL AD SUPPORT OBASANJO?  
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16. (C) Riven by internal conflict, the already factionalized AD may split again. Much of the friction revolves around the question of whether the party will support Obasanjo or field its own candidate. Apparently, most AD governors and the faction loyal to National Chairman Abdulkadir support Obasanjo. However, two other factions opposed to Obasanjo have issued public statements purporting that Abdulkadir has been removed from office. The Abdulkadir group is probably larger than the other two factions combined. Meanwhile, the Yoruba leaders group, Afenifere, has been at loggerheads with the AD governors for control of the party. Partly because of this competition and some longstanding antipathies between Afenifere leaders and the President, Afenifere has delayed enunciating its position on whether the AD should back Obasanjo. (COMMENT: While the anti-Obasanjo factions in the party do not seem to represent the majority, their activities have made an untidy spectacle of the AD. These factions may be receiving support from Obasanjo opponents outside the party. In the end, the AD will likely support Obasanjo. Although AD factionalism will diminish that endorsement's value somewhat, it still will be seen by many as an expression that Obasanjo is secure in the Southwest. END COMMENT.)

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COUNTERFEIT VOTER CARDS IN LAGOS  
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17. (C) Newspapers reported the alleged confiscation of two-five million fake voter registration cards last week. Our contacts confirm that the actual event was the arrest of a clerk who had been bribed to make five cards, with possibly more on the way. The clerk is still in detention, and no other arrests have been made. (COMMENT: Once again the sensationalist press got it wrong. However, the publication of such stories demonstrates how ready people are to believe that electoral fraud will be on a massive scale and INEC is either powerless to stop these designs or is complicit in them. END COMMENT)

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IGBO GROUP FAILS TO CHOSE CONSENSUS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE  
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18. (C) Ohaneze Ndigbo, the most influential Igbo leadership group, has been unable to select a consensus candidate from among the six Igbo candidates chosen by different parties. The January 31 meeting Ohaneze held with the Igbo candidates ended in stalemate. APGA, the only predominately Igbo party, argued that Ohaneze should first direct Igbos to the party where their influence is the strongest, i.e. APGA. If APGA's petition had been accepted, selection of its candidate, controversial former Biafran leader Emeka Ojukwu, would have been a foregone conclusion. The other Igbo candidates contended that Ohaneze should concentrate on identifying the candidate most likely to win (clearly not Ojukwu) and not on the parties. (COMMENT: The fractious nature of Igbo politics makes reaching a consensus very difficult. Ohaneze and the candidates will meet again in Abuja the week of February 10-14 to continue discussions. END COMMENT.)

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ATIKU GETS A NEW TITLE  
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19. (C) The Ooni of Ife, the preeminent Yoruba traditional leader, conferred the Yoruba chieftancy title of &Aare Adimula8 on Vice President Abubakar Atiku February 1 in an apparent acceptance of the VP by the Yoruba leadership. The conferment was the Ooni,s way of repaying Atiku for standing by Obasanjo during the PDP convention last month. During the ceremony, the Ooni stated that Atiku could be assured of Yoruba support for &any future political activities,8 a not too oblique reference to the 2007 presidential contest. (COMMENT: Atiku February 7 told DCM he was very pleased with the title and the implication of future support it conferred. END COMMENT).

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